

RDO RJE'S GHOST RESEARCH

Chos skyong skyabs མཚོ་སྒྲོང་སྒྲུབ་པ། (Qiejiangjia 切江加)*

There are many stories and definitions of ghosts and much ongoing vigorous debate about what a ghost is. Many knowledgeable people, including religious scholars, have debated ghost questions for ages: When did ghosts first appear? When did humans first have the idea of ghosts? What, exactly, is a ghost? Do ghosts even exist?

Rdo rje returned home to complete research for his Ph.D. thesis. Enrolled in the Parapsychology Department of a renowned UK university, he had studied God, gods, deities, spooks, banshees, ghosts, ghouls, specters, souls, spirits, wraiths, phantoms, demons, evils, etc. His department was busily digging into old questions surrounding these ideas, eager to find clear answers. It also had ample resources to support students in research and provided technical devices deemed essential in finding and supporting answers.

Rdo rje was focused on showing proof that ghosts exist. He grew up where the supernatural was a daily reality. He had heard at least a thousand accounts of ghosts. Before becoming a college student, he had never doubted the existence of such entities. However, his ideas began changing after contact with modern ideas.

Eager to identify those who had seen and experienced ghostly manifestations once he was back home, Rdo rje interviewed and recorded information from nearly one hundred locals willing to share their stories. He also planned to put cameras in haunted places at night, hoping to find evidence of ghosts.

Uncle Zla ba had heard about Rdo rje's questions and asked, with a warm smile, "Do I need to tell you ghost stories?" when Rdo rje visited.

"Yes! Uncle Zla ba, how are you doing?"

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"I'm doing well," Uncle Zla ba replied, and after pausing a while, began:

Ghosts are the spirits of those who died from a tragic accident or committed suicide. Their spirits stay where the event occurred. Human eyes rarely see ghosts, but horses and dogs can. For example, three shepherds once drove their sheep to a place where nobody lived. During mealtime after some ten days, one of the men said, "Today I met a gorgeous woman on the mountain who sang several love songs that suggested she is single and looking for a spouse. I must visit her tonight because that's what I promised her today."

He quickly finished his meal and rode away on his black horse.

The next day, he described what had happened to his fellows: "She and her mother live in a tent behind this mountain. She told me her mother left on a pilgrimage two months ago. She thinks her mother will not return. She has smooth, warm skin and amazingly soft and round breasts."

One friend said, "Lucky you! Is she beautiful?"

"She didn't let me see her face, but I think so."

This man often left after their evening meal. His two companions wondered why they had never seen a woman nearby. Increasingly suspicious, they followed him one evening after he left. The man crossed a mountain, reached the lower valley, tied his horse's reins to a bush, untied his Tibetan robe, lay next to a stone, and began chatting. Shocked, the other two men left to seek advice from a local bla ma.

"Right! But, hmm... please tell me your own experiences!" Rdo rje interjected.

Uncle Zla ba thought for a while and said:

I don't have any personal experiences, but 'Brug dkar told me a story recently. I'm not sure who exactly was involved, but two of our young men went night dating. Returning to their homes, they walked through Nyag dmar Valley. When one needed to answer nature's call, his companion waited nearby. Suddenly, a dog ran towards him. He pulled out his dog-beater and whirled it. As the dog got closer, he urged his friend to help, but he remained squatting, ignoring him. Alone and fearful,

he whirled his dog-beater and struck out at the dog before realizing there was no dog – he was beating a boulder.

Discussing what had happened, the two friends concluded the dog was a ghost and quickly left.

Rdo rje was keenly interested in this account, thinking he was on the verge of a significant discovery, so he left Uncle Zla ba and went to 'Brug dkar's home. 'Brug dkar said he had heard the story from another man, so Rdo rje next went to interview him. Rdo rje met several men in turn before finally meeting the two young men involved, who told him the story's original version, which was much different from what he had heard from Uncle Zla ba.

One said he was bored that night while waiting for his friend, so he just took out his dog-beater and whirled it, pretending he was fighting a dog. The other man related the story of the dog-ghost differently. He said that while defecating, his friend, who was about ten meters away, was whirling his dog-beater. It looked like he was beating something and shouted, "Hurry up! A dog is attacking!"

This seemed weird since he was near me, and I couldn't see any dog. Suddenly, my friend laughed and said, "Defecate more quickly next time. Let's go home."

I then realized that he was pretending and that there had been no dog attack.

Despite weeks of painstaking research, Rdo rje could not find any verifiable local accounts. He noticed that the ghost stories became more varied and elaborate, with more exciting and dramatic details as they passed from teller to teller.

Still, in pursuit of ghosts, Rdo rje chose several places described as haunted, such as the local *dur khrod* 'sky burial grounds' and places where people had died in car accidents, to surveil. He positioned cameras at night, but nothing appeared in his video records. After losing some expensive equipment, he concluded that ghosts probably stole them.

Convinced he had found something new about ghosts, he considered how to use this information to document local ghosts, complete his thesis, and look for suitable employment.

TIBETAN TERMS

'brug dkar འབྲུག་དཀར།

bla ma བླ་མ།

chos skyong skyabs ཚོས་སྐྱོང་སྐྱམས།

dur khrod དུར་ཁྲོད།

nyag dmar ཉག་དམར།

rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ།

zla ba ཟླ་བ།

CHINESE TERM

Qiejiangjia 切江加